

The Grey Mare in the Garret

Folk-Lore And Legends: German

German

Intermediate
5 min read

In the portal of the Church of the Apostles, near the new market in Cologne, hung a picture, the portraits of a certain Frau Richmodis von Aducht and her two children, of whom the following singular story is related. The picture was covered with a curtain which she worked with her own hands.

Her husband, Richmuth von Aducht, was, in the year of grace 1400, a rich burgomaster of Cologne, and lived at the sign of the Parroquet in the New Marckt. In that year a fearful plague desolated all quarters of the city. She fell sick of the pest, and, to all appearance, died. After the usual period had elapsed she was buried in the vaults of the Apostles' Church. She was buried, as the custom then was, with her jewelled rings on her fingers, and most of her rich ornaments on her person. These tempted the cupidity of the sexton of the church. He argued with himself that they were no use to the corpse, and he determined to possess them. Accordingly he proceeded in the dead of night to the vault where she lay interred, and commenced the work of sacrilegious spoliation. He first unscrewed the coffin lid. He then removed it altogether, and proceeded to tear away the shroud which interposed between him and his prey. But what was his horror to perceive the corpse clasp her hands slowly together, then rise, and finally sit erect in the coffin. He was rooted to the earth. The corpse made as though it would step from its narrow bed, and the sexton fled, shrieking, through the vaults. The corpse followed, its long white shroud floating like a meteor in the dim light of the lamp, which, in his haste, he had forgotten. It was not until he reached his own door that he had sufficient courage to look behind him, and then, when he perceived no trace of his pursuer, the excitement which had sustained him so far subsided, and he sank senseless to the earth.

In the meantime Richmuth von Aducht, who had slept scarcely a moment since the death of his dear wife, was surprised by the voice of his old manservant, who rapped loudly at his chamber door, and told him to awake and come forth, for his mistress had arisen from the dead, and was then at the gate of the courtyard.

"Bah!" said he, rather pettishly, "go thy ways, Hans; you dream, or are mad, or drunk. What you see is quite impossible. I should as soon believe my old grey mare had got into the garret as that my wife was at the courtyard gate."

Trot, trot, trot, trot, suddenly resounded high over his head.

"What's that?" asked he of his servant.

"I know not," replied the man, "an' it be not your old grey mare in the garret."

They descended in haste to the courtyard, and looked up to the window of the attic. Lo and behold! there was indeed the grey mare with her head poked out of the window, gazing down with her great eyes on her master

and his man, and seeming to enjoy very much her exalted station, and their surprise at it.

Knock, knock, knock went the rapper of the street gate.

“It is my wife!” “It is my mistress!” exclaimed master and man in the same breath.

The door was quickly unfastened, and there, truly, stood the mistress of the mansion, enveloped in her shroud.

“Are you alive or dead?” exclaimed the astonished husband.

“Alive, my dear, but very cold,” she murmured faintly, her teeth chattering the while, as those of one in a fever chill; “help me to my chamber.”

He caught her in his arms and covered her with kisses. Then he bore her to her chamber, and called up the whole house to welcome and assist her. She suffered a little from fatigue and fright, but in a few days was very much recovered.

The thing became the talk of the town, and hundreds flocked daily to see, not alone the lady that was rescued from the grave in so remarkable a manner, but also the grey mare which had so strangely contrived to get into the garret.

The excellent lady lived long and happily with her husband, and at her death was laid once more in her old resting-place. The grey mare, after resting in the garret three days, was got down by means of scaffolding, safe and sound. She survived her mistress for some time, and was a general favourite in the city, and when she died her skin was stuffed, and placed in the arsenal as a curiosity. The sexton went mad with the fright he had sustained, and in a short time entered that bourn whence he had so unintentionally recovered the burgomaster’s wife.

Not only was this memorable circumstance commemorated in the Church of the Apostles, but it was also celebrated in *bassi relievi* figures on the walls of the burgomaster’s residence—the sign of the Parroquet in the New Marckt. The searcher after antiquities will, however, look in vain for either. They are not now to be found. Modern taste has defaced the porch where stood the one, and erected a shapeless structure on the site of the other.

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